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THE SWEETEST LADY OF THEM ALL

by Ralph A. Jacobs

Martial music fills the air . . . interrupted by the precision marching of hundreds of feet belonging to men in gray-green uniforms. Column after column marches in neatly aligned rows through the Brandenburg gate . . . the men of the guard battalion know how the goose-step is supposed to be done and keep perfect formation in the process. Here and there, other men in the blue uniforms of the police are trying to keep fast-forming crowds of onlookers in check. Almost every building displays flags with a swastika in the center.

Even though it's early in the morning and the sun has not come out fully, one can sense a great excitement everywhere which runs like an electric current through the spectators of this military pageantry. Earlier in the morning the radio had announced that the "Fuhrer" will speak at 10 o'clock in the morning. With the international scene of one crisis displacing another as a sort of merry-go-round. The situation vis-a-vis Poland having reached the explosion stage, everyone's nerves were taut and on edge . . . . The question of the hour was, what will the "Fuhrer" have to say and what will Germany do? Will Hitler again succeed in a bloodless bluff or will it start this time?

The date of this memorable day, September 1, 1939 . . . the location, Berlin, the capital of Nazi Germany . . . the time - 9:30 in the morning. While all this is going on and almost every ear is anxiously awaiting a dictator's decision for war or peace, a couple of hundred yards at the most, from the Chancellory at the "Wilhelmstrasse" in a straight line of adjoining backyards, stands a building where an entirely different atmosphere reigns; where it all seems this outside hustle and bustle is unreal and nothing can disturb the calm and serenity prevailing inside. This building houses the office of the United States Consul General for Germany. Since

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quite early, a line of people has been forming outside patiently waiting their turn to pass through the doors. Even though the line was orderly, everybody gave the impression that everything depended on getting "inside". Almost all the people had one paramount interest, how to escape Hitler's Third Reich and to reach the shores of the United States, where one could start anew without fear of persecution, where one could live in human dignity, not being constantly afraid of life itself.

For some people in this line outside the Consul General's office, this was indeed the big day; today they were to receive this so invaluable piece of paper which was supposed to give them permission to come to America. Today, they were to receive the key which would unlock the gates to a new existance. One did not have to look very hard to spot a few smiling and laughing faces here and there, somehow their elated feelings and the way they held their heads bared in one glance their inner happiness; this was their day . . . . Yet, the majority of people standing quietly in line did not reflect any particular feeling in behavior or appearance; they only wanted to check how much longer they would have to wait before their number would be called to receive this little piece of paper which meant everything. Of course, they knew how long they had to wait, but just to be reassured that their affidavits were in order and that their turn would come was enough medicine for their souls. For some it was like a ritual to check every few weeks just how one stood as far as the waiting lists were concerned, even if their time was a long way off, but to hope is human, and perhaps some day . . . .

"Here are your papers all stamped and in order and I wish you good luck," said the Vice-Consul to an eighteen year old boy who stood before him straight but with trembling knees .

As you have correctly assumed, the boy in question is the author of this story. Shortly after having left the Consulate and turned around the corner down Berlin's main street, "Unter den Linden", the radio loudspeakers at every intersec-

ion blared forth Hitler's screams that the order for Germany to march had been given, and since dawn the German army was fighting to destroy Poland. The people in the streets look- at each other and one could notice a barely perceptible breath of relief that the agony of uncertainty was over, now they knew . . . yet, one could also sense a sort of subdued feeling hanging in the air, by the almost complete absence of any patriotic manifestations as a time like that would be appropriate to sidplay. Everyone's hope and concern was, that this would not generate the real thing . . . . Besides, events moved too rapidly for the average man to digest in an orderly, teutonic fashion. Only the week before, his sensibilities were shocked by the marriage of Nazism with Soviet Communism. After all, didn't Hitler call Russian Communism the Number One enemy? Of course, the "Fuhrer" knows best and Poland will find out in short order what it means to feel the power of the "Wehrmacht" in their legitimate quest of incorporating Danzig and the Corridor into the living space of Greater Germany . . . but one could not rid oneself of this uneasy feeling that this was the start of another big show. Would the Western Democracies, England and France, honor their pledge towards Poland? Or would the "Fuhrer's" gamble pay of again like always? These were the unexpressed sentiments of the man in the street.

Clutching my American entry permit tightly in my hands as if it were part of my body, I followed my mother, trance-like, hurrying to the subway station to escape from this particular neighborhood; accompanied all the way by the screams of Hitler's voice trying to justify his actions. All I could think of, I have my American permit right here between my fingers and that was all that mattered. After leaving the subway and sitting comfortably in my aunt's apartment in another section of Berlin and listening to my aunt and mother discussing the situation, with both of them in tears, I started to come to myself again, like waking up after a drug induced dream.

I heard my mother saying now the boy has the papers but it's too late, he will never get out, all this hope for him at least to be saved, but now it's all in vain.

That same evening we left Berlin by train for a small town in Central Germany where we lived. After arriving home a letter awaited us, stating that the United States Line vessel, the U.S.S. Manhattan, would not make port at Hamburg, Germany, due to the uncertain world conditions, but would only go as far as Le Havre, France. The Manhattan was the ship on which I was scheduled to leave Hamburg on September 5, 1939. The problem looked almost hopeless, particularly as on September 3, England and France made good their pledge towards Poland and declared war on the Third Reich. Now, all strings had broken, war surrounded Germany, culminating into a world-wide conflagration, not to end for six long years, until the defeat and utter destruction of Hitler's Germany. Yet, on the third of September, one could not crystal gaze into the future. The only thing that mattered as far as I was concerned, was trying to make the coastline of the United States, especially where I had the entrance key right in my hand. But what was I to do now? Here I was the possessor of a German passport with the exit visa already stamped and no transportaion available. Also, there was urgent danger that Germany might revoke all passports due to being at war with her neighbors.

My parents sent me alone to Berlin to try to find out whether any of the other neutral countries like Holland, Norway, Denmark or Sweden would accept a transfer of my United States Line ticket to one of their own. For several days, from early in the morning till late in the evening, I stood in line in the officesof various shipping lines only to hear the same story repeated again and again; that due to the yet uncertain declaration of the belligerents, all shipping is cancelled until further notice. It was most discouraging to wait a long time in line to hear the almost, same shopworn answers day after day. Running around the streets of Berlin in that

fashion another depressing factor was being forced to listen to the constant radio communiques announcing one great Nazi victory after another culminating with the killing of additional thousands of "subhumans" as the members of the "Master Race" referred to the Poles. By now, the mood of the populace began to assume an overbearing and arrogant behavior. The "Fuehrer" was right again and Poland will soon be "Kaputt", was the concensus of opinion. England and France had better come to terms; otherwise the "Fuehrer" will teach them a lesson they won't soon forget, was expounded by many.

But, with all this going on, I persistently kept up my hunt for transportation to get to the United States. There is one great advantage in being eighteen years of age; one has the physical stamina and mental ignorance to keep on bucking the odds. So. one day, after a couple of weeks of futile effort, I heard that ships will start sailing from Italy very shortly. I immediately went to the office of the Italian Shiping Line and the rumor was confirmed. They agreed to accept as trade-in my United States Line ticket in view of its dollar value. My ticket was prepaid in American currency by my aunt who had sponsored me. Now, everything looked rosy but only for a few minutes and I felt as if I had been hit by a sledgehammer as the shipping official informed me of the further conditions of the trade. Since, as a foreigner, I could only travel first or tourist class on an Italian ship, quite an additional sum of money was needed and only one currency was acceptable, namely American dollars; no other would do.

How and where would I get them with the foreign currency restrictions of the Third Reich? It was further pointed out to me, the additional dollars would have to be in the possession of the Italian Line before a ticket could be issued, then they would undertake to secure an Italian entry permit of forty-eight hours duration for the purpose of boarding one of their ships. Here was opportunity, but the obstacles looked almost insurmountable. Nevertheless, for the next few days I

spent most of my time at the post offices in Berlin unleashing a barrage of telegrams directed to the home of my aunt in the United States explaining the whole situation and pleading for her help. Showing her kindness and generosity she deposited the required amount to the account of the Italian Line. As long as I live I shall never forget this help which my aunt provided so promptly and will always cherish her memory.

Now everything was easy, the path seemed smooth and well-greased with much coveted American money so far as the Italian Line was concerned. Of course, there was always the danger that Germany might seal off her borders without notice. But to my good fortune the Germans were drunk with victories, with Poland laying prostrate at their feet in such a short span of time. They were busy celebrating and singing "Today Germany belongs to us, tomorrow the whole world" . . . .

After a tearful farwell from my parents, I boarded an express train early in the morning of September 26, 1939 at Berlin, bound for Genoa, Italy, where I was scheduled to board the "Saturnia". Never again was I to see my parents alive, as they both died during the war, victims of Hitler's persecution of minorities. Yet, I could not foresee that at this moment. All that concerned me, trembling with excitement, was the fact that my great adventure had finally begun; in this way reacting as any other young fellow of the same age.

The train trip was relatively uneventful and late the following afternoon, I arrived in Genoa. After securing an inexpensive hotel room and presenting myself at the office of the steamship line, I was all set to await sailing time two days hence. Genoa is a very charming and picturesque city, having played a prominent part historically, so consequently there was much to see in the short time I had at my disposal. The only limiting factors in all my undertakings were of financial nature. Since I am an avid sight-seer, I had to pass up many opportunities for exploration, as all the funds Germany permitted me to take out, was the princely sum of ten

Marks, which at the then valid rate of exchange represented not more than approximately $2.30. Even though the amount in Italian Lire was some "bargain", one still had to watch pennies very closely.

The sun shone brightly this September 29th and I was already comfortably established in my cabin aboard the Saturnia when I answered a knock on my door. There stood an official of the ship informing me that they were in possession of a notice that the additional money had been paid in the United States, but their office here had no confirmation that the money was actually received; and in absence of this, they could assume that perhaps the money had been withdrawn later. Also, would I please leave the ship and wait at their harbor office until this matter was straightened out? Dumbfounded, I followed the official, while the stewards gathered up my baggage and brought it along. Several phone calls to the Genoa main office proved fruitless.

While all this was going on, the Saturnia sailed right on time; after all, they do not hold up a big ship for one passenger. How I felt at this moment is hard to describe. All my hopes seemed shattered and I was completely numb.

A couple of hours after the departure of the ship, a smiling official confronted me, they had found the money. He told me the mistake was made by their New York office, as the confirmation of the money was sent to their Trieste bureau, the starting port of the Saturnia, instead of to their branch at Genoa. With many regrets and apologies he assured me that the next ship to sail would have me on board. Answering my question as to when that would be, he was unable to say at the moment, but I should check at their office every day. Also, he consented to store most of my luggage so that I would not be hindered in any way.

Leaving the office, I walked away dumbfounded, all I could think of was to keep on going and maybe I can straighten everything out. Wandering through the streets of Genoa for

several hours, besides being tired, my stomach made itself known by an unmistakable murmer and gnawing feeling. To my horror, I discovered that I only had a few lire in my posession, not enough for a decent meal or even a night's lodging. What to do now? Here I was in a foreign country, practically penniless and no one to turn to for help.

Well, first things have to be done first. With almost half of my money I bought a loaf of bread to keep the persistent stomach noises in check. After having finished most of it in one sitting, I put the little piece I had left over in my pocket just in case I should need it again . . . . In the meantime, it became quite late in the evening and by my aimless wanderings I reached a small park where there were some benches. Maybe I can sit on one of them for the night, flashed through my mind. Yet, it was not easy at all to find an empty one as most of them were occupied by loving couple. But, I was too tired to care whether I would be making a nuisance out of myself. After sitting on this bench for a while, the couple already there left in disgust, probably deploring my bad mannerers and I became the sole possessor of the seat.

In a way, I was lucky, as this particular bench was in a very secluded spot, so I stretched out and was soon asleep. The cold winds from the sea which the early morning brought forth, woke me up. Sitting up shivering, all of a sudden the thought struck me, my Italian transit visa has expired this past midnight; now, if the police catch me I probably would be sent back to Germany or put into an Italian prison. Even though it was still dark, as the dawn had only just begun to break, I walked as fast as I could away from my open-air bed with fear hurrying my every step. Once in a while I stopped, as I was afraid to attract notice by the few workers already out in the streets, and to calm my excessive heart-pounding. Without noticing it, I had finished the piece of bread I carried in my pocket from the day before. Now the day was in full swing and the streets were busy with people hurrying af-

ter their varied pursuits. The traffic noises were increasing, so some of my fear left me and I kept walking at a normal pace, albeit aimlessly, with no particular place to go.

Whenever the hungry feeling became overpowering, I drank some water from the many public fountains which Genoa had. Yet, towards evening I just could not go on, and bought bread which was gulped down, not even leaving a little piece for the next day. After feeling relatively full now, the problem of how to spend the night again became acute. Try as I would, I could not find the same park again. By walking around, I drifted towards a section of the harbor where many dilapidated buildings were standing and where it was very dark. Between empty crates and ill-smelling refuse I found a big enough wooden box to sit in and close my eyes.

When I awoke daylight was all around me, physical and mental exhaustion had made me sleep the whole night through. Of course, now, since being awake I was afraid of being discovered, so I left as quickly and unobtrusively as possible. The better part of the morning was spent watching ships being loaded and unloaded, and of course, drinking lots of water to suppress stomaches. During a conversation with some sailors, it occurred to me that perhaps I could sell some of my clothes which were being stored at the office of the shipping line. By mentioning the various articles I was willing to sell, I casually said that I had a new German typewriter. The sailors were immediately interested and told me to be back the next morning with it as they were sure I could get a good price. After making a definite appointment I was lucky to find the same sleeping quarters as the previous night.

Bright and early I was at the Italian Line office, waiting a long time, so it seemed, for it to open. After checking the typewriter out, I ran into the same official with whom I had dealt when I was forced to leave the Saturnia. He told me that the Italian Line had secured an automatic extension of my forty-eight hour transit visa till the next ship would sail for the United States. Hearing this, a stone fell

from my heart as I would not have to be afraid of being arrested, and be free of all the unpleasant complications I had already visualized.

Even though I had a splitting headache and felt weak from not having eaten at all the previous day, I walked away elated, with my typewriter under my arm, to keep the appointment with the sailors. Reaching the agreed location I did not have to wait very long for my friends to show up. After carefully examining the typewriter they offered me eight hundred and fifty lire for it. Later. I found out that this was only a fraction of it's actual worth in Italy at this time, but, at the moment, all I could think of was that this means money and money means food. So, without any bargaining at all on my part, I accepted their terms.

Now, I was affluent, particularly, since a million dollars could not have been of more value to me at this point. The first thing I did with my newfound wealth was to stop at the bakery. In the afternoon, I looked for a furnished room instead of a hotel, in order to conserve my finances, since I did not know of how long a duration my wait would be.

Sleeping in a bed and eating regularly, I checked every day at the Shipping Line whether a ship would leave Genoa bound for the U.S. One day I was told that the luxury liner and pride of the Italian Line, the Conte di Savoia, was due to depart a couple of days hence and I was booked as a passenger. Now, time stood still again, as I eagerly awaited the 14th of October, 1939 to board the vessel. Very early in the morning, I stood before the locked gates, counting the minutes for them to swing open. It was most interesting to watch a big ship's preparations for receiving its customers, and the beautiful view the Conte di Savoia presented, laying there so peaceful and serene in her full majesty, like a sleeping queen in fairy tales. Unfortunately my heart was immune to all this, which would normally interest me and be properly appreciated. When will those gates open; overshadowed any other thoughts I

might have had.

Eventually the time arrived for the passengers to be taken on. After having passed all requirements this time, I settled in my cabin waiting for the ship to start its journey. Of course, I dreaded the possibility that somebody might knock on my door again, taking me off as had happened once before. On the other hand, I was hoping that everything would be alright now and I would see the skyline of New York in just about a week. Sharply at twelve o'clock noon I felt the vibration with the accompanying noises of engines warming up, and very slowly the colossus started to set itself in motion. I could begin to breathe easier now. In no time at all, the outline of the port of Genoa became dim as the giant craft opened up her powerful machinery, but to me the hum of her engines sounded like the nicest song I had ever heard. Relaxed and happy, enjoying my first meal on board, I was particularly pleased in having drawn two middle-aged American couples as table companions, which gave me an excellent chance to brush up on my English.

The following morning the ship docked at Naples for a few hours to take on additional passengers. I made quite a few friends, with anybody speaking English getting preferential treatment, since I discovered that the English I had learned in school was different from the American version. For instance, I found out that Americans use "elevators" instead of "lifts", etc. But most American passengers were good natured and patiently corrected some of my linguistic flaws. In any case, it was a most enjoyable pastime as far as I was concerned. Continuing to enjoy the outstanding and delectable cuisine provided me with such a feeling of contentment that the future never looked brighter and I let myself dream of the many things I would do once I landed in America.

Walking on deck after breakfast on the morning of October 16th I enjoyed the pleasant rays of sunshine which felt so good at this time of year. The Conti di Savoia glided gracefully

over the waters of the Mediterranean; comments were heard that in another day we will be in the Atlantic and one will not get such pleasant weather as this, so one should take advantage of the remaining opportunity to obtain a little suntan. Strolling in such a leisurely fashion, I noticed many people looking in one direction, while some had their binoculars out scanning the horizon. Since it seemed the appropriate thing to do at the time, I joined the onlookers, but all I could make out were a couple of small dots that appeared to be ships at a great distance. At the same time, the engines slowed down, coming to a full stop in short order. Whay was that? "What happened", was on everyones lips.

In the meantime, these so tiny spots became larger and more discernible with every passing second. Now, one could make out that they were two small warships of destroyer size with the Tri-color of France flying in the wind, and were boring in full course on our ship. Probably and Allied check for war contraband, was each ones' opinion. Since this is a neutral passenger vessel, not having any cargo, this was evidently just a mere formality, and we would soon be on our way, we thought, as the destroyers came to a stop. For a while, it represented some diversion for the passengers to eye the goings on, but since nothing happened, most got bored with the view and life resumed the previous pattern.

All of a sudden this tranquility was broken and everybody's interest reawakened, as a couple of boats were launched from the interceptors and headed towards us. Watching a small party of French marines being received on board, the passengers wondered what was going on, as one of the two boats had traveled around to the other side of the Conti di Savoia. The engines started humming again and we resumed sailing flanked on either side by our French escorts. Now excitement took over! Where are we going? What is going to happen? Why? "Italy is neutral and we, being on one of their ships, are on neutral ground, so what right do the French have to stop us like that," was

heard more often than not. The ship's personnel contributed in an admirable way to calm the charged atmosphere, pointing out, that this was only a formality and nothing to worry about.

We did not have to wait very long to find out the reason for this intervention as the announcement over the intercommunication system requested all persons of German nationality to report, without delay, to the main lobby to be interviewed by representatives of the French Navy. By the time I arrived downstairs, a good sized crowd had assembled, waiting for the interviews to begin. One could sense immediately the nervousness of all those people even though most men in this group pretended to be calm for appearance' sake. -"What do they want from us, we are non-belligerent civilians and on neutral ground," was repeated again and again at the various small talks going on, as people tried to allay their fears in anticipation of their parley with the French. In due process, my name was called and I was ushered into an office where two youngish naval officer, flanked on either side by a marine, were sitting. Answering their question as to whether I had ever served in the German armed forces in the negative, they also wanted to know whether my sentiments were in favor of the Allies, to which I unqualifiedly replied in the affirmative and emphasized to them that I was a refugee from Hitler's Germany on account of my religion and on my way to the United States to live in freedom from persecution. Thanking me, they said that was all, and I was dismissed. Thinking this formality was now over with, I downed a hearty lunch, afterwards taking in a few games of ping-pong and otherwise relaxing with small talk.

Towards late afternoon, all signs made it quite clear that we were approaching land. Excitement took hold of the voyagers again as everyone wanted to know where we were being convoyed and what was the purpose of all this. Our stewards informed us that we were nearing the port of Algiers in French North Africa; any further questioning proved fruitless as they

had no further information. When our ship reached the outer confines of the harbor, her engines ground to a complete stop. Very shortly thereafter, several other warships appeared on the scene, evidently to augment French naval strength, vis-a-vis, an unarmed passenger vessel. Now, we were witness to lots of goings on as more officers from the surrounding ships boarded, while others left. Of course, nobody knew what was happening. All kinds of rumors made the rounds and everybody had one good guess to contribute as his share of being in the dark of the events taking place. Some pessimistic souls has supposedly gathered information that Italy had entered the war against the Allies or was on the verge of doing so.

By now, it was completely dark and suppertime was in full swing, as an announcement over the loudspeaker requested all male German nationals from the ages of eighteen to fifty years, immediately, to proceed to the main lobby. There names were checked by a ship's officer. After ascertaining that everybody desired was present, our Captain started to address this assembly, informing us that by order of the French Admiralty we were to be taken off his ship and to be interned by the authorities in Algiers while the Conti di Savoia would continue on her voyage to the United States. Assuring us of his regrets and saying Italy would protest this action. Nobody, after hearing this, paid any further attention to his speech. Once the first shock had worn off, all hell broke loose. Most men affected were middle-aged and married, with wife and children on board. Quite a few, like myself, were fleeing from Hitler's persecution and could not grasp the meaning of this order. Others were German nationals with a long time residence in America who had been visiting their families in Germany after many years absence and on their way home caught by the outbreak of the war.

Looking around, as if in a daze I noted only a very few younger faces as most other men were surrounded by wailing women and children. It was heartbreaking to witness what was

going on; even though I was in a mental stupor, I still felt compassion for my, soon to be companions in misery, more so, than for myself. Trying not to think, I feebly tried to give encouragement to some people who had befriended me these past couple of days and whose loved ones were carrying on terribly; only to be repulsed in my efforts by several of them and being told, "You are only a kid and don't underatand what all this means. For you it's a big adventure." True, being only eigteen years old and so, being a child by comparison to most of these people, in not having to worry about wife and children, I nevertheless felt crushed as ll my dreams seemed shattered and all my efforts up to now to reach the U.S. had turned to naught, even though expecting the worst to happen. Despite all the wailing and clinging of worried families, every man after his name was called had to disembark into a waiting French naval launch. To shorten the tearful farewells, the marines hurried us along as much as possible. Having secured every person wanted, the launch shoved off without further ado, amid tears and waving of hands. Getting closer to land the outline of the Conti di Savoia became smaller with each passing minute and in no time at all only her lights could be seen and even these became dim after a while.

Everybody had his eyes fixed on the ship's diminishing outline and we did not notice that the launch had stopped. A sharp, commanding voice brought us back to reality and all turned in its direction. We began to see in front of us a lighted building, evidently ready for our reception. But behold what a sight was presented to out view; surrounding the building and in double lines from the boats till the open gate of this structure, were troops, steel-helmeted and with drawn bayonets. Even to us, feeling so low, a spectacle like this failed not to loose its humorous side, being welcomed by such a military display. Evidently, the authoities did not intend for even a mouse to escape, if anybody had thought of getting away under the circumstances. There was this voice

once again, ordering us to proceed with our luggage, single file towards the building. Once inside the custom officials made a very careful and detailed search of all baggage and ourselves which took a long time to complete. After having finished, name tags were put on all items and soldiers took them away to be loaded on a waiting truck, while we were told to relax and rest. Our questions of what was to be done as far as we were concerned, was answered, "we would soon find out." Needless to say, while we were waiting in such a fashion for the inevitable, we were completely surrounded by soldiers at all times.

What seemed like an eternity finally came to an end as three buses drove up and we were ordered to get in. The back and front seats were occupied by armed guards. In front and in between each bus was a truckload of troops. Heavily guarded, the convoy started to move to an unknown destination. Rumbling through the streets of Algiers everybody tried to look towards the water to see whether one could not catch a last glimpse of the Conti di Savoia; but no matter how much we strained the ship was nowhere in sight. The full hopelessness of our situation finally hit home as several men started to cry unashamedly, as they thought of their loved ones whom they had to leave behind and who would arrive in America without them. Hours went by as the procession continued on without stopping. The vehicles were driven as if the drivers were in a hurry to get rid of their cargo. Many anxious moments were had by all of us as we noticed that we were passing through a mountainous area, after having left Algiers, and the drivers took curves as if they were non-existent. In the meantime, the light of morning broke through, and we wondered to what god-forsaken place we were being delivered, as for a long period now, we did not see any signs of habitation or civilization. If we would not have been so preoccupied with what fate had in store for us, possibly, we could have enjoyed the beautiful views the scenery presented. But all the beauty was of no avail

to offer any consolation to our inner anxiety as to what the end of the line would bring for us.

Looking ahead, we could see several buildings enclosed by barbed wire, and patrolled by Colonial troops. Reaching the gate of this compound, the buses were directed towards the inside, while our guards disembarked outside. A sargeant ordered us to get out and line up, waiting for him to check our names off against the list given him in Algiers. Somehow, it seemed they wanted to make sure that nobody escaped, as if this were at all possible with our being so heavily guarded. Very shortly and officer appeared, introducing himself as a captain of the Colonial infantry and commander of this internment camp. Informing us that the name of our new home was called "Camp Suzzoni", and it was located a few miles from Fort Boghar where a regiment of colonial troops was stationed. Our guards were members of the Boghar troops, who had strict orders to enforce, rigidly, any command of their superiors in dealing with the prisoners, so he recommended instant obedience. He warned us not to try to escape. Even if successful, we would not get very far as the distance to civilization was considerable; also, the surrounding Arab population would be only to happy to return us dead or alive, for the bounty money the authorities would pay them. We stood silently in line, while some rubbed their eyes, either to stop approaching tears or in disbelief of the past twenty-four hours; the transition from a luxury liner passenger, on his way to a new life - to a prison camp in Africa, was just to great and unreal for full comprehension. The captain continued his address explaining that the camp was to serve as the internment camp for all German nationals living at any French overseas possession. For the time being, prisoners of several African territories were here already and many more would arrive at some future date. Since we would be held here for the duration of the war, it would be to our interest to cooperate with the authorities in any demands made upon us. With the

addition of a few more remarks regarding camp life, the talk of our new boss was concluded and we were turned over to the same sargeant who had checked us off when we arrived.

We were marched to one of the brick buildings in the compound and told this would be our quarters. Entering, most of us shuddered; seeing in what a deplorable condition and state of decay this structure was. It had been a stable for horses with the only difference - it was no longer fit for animals but was to serve as shelter for humans. Probably, in this part of Africa, a horse had a higher value than man, and no self-respecting steed would accept such accommodations. Later on we found out that this had been the headquarters of a Cavalry Detachment long before the turn of the century and had evidently, not been used for anything since; this explained the condition of the buildings. Asking the non-com whether he was serious in giving us this particular stable as quarters, he shrugged his shoulders and walked away. Having busied ourselves for quite some time to ready our new "home" for occupancy by fixing the gaping holes everywhere as best we could and carting out mountains of dirt; we could not help thinking of the luxury which had been ours such a short time ago. Our contemplation was rudely interrupted and we were told to get straw for bedding. Being issued one blanket per man and straw for beds to sleep on concrete floors, we were afraid that this would be insufficient to keep us warm, but the sargeant who gave us this told us, in no uncertain terms, that was all we would be allowed.

After having straightened things out as well as we were able under the circumstances, we came in contact with many of the internees of adjoining barracks who told us newcomers what to expect. Hearing all these stories and knowing the primitive conditions under which we would be living from now on, made for a gloomy feeling all around. Next morning, we were marched, under heavy guard, towards Fort Boghar where we were employed in various clean-up chores while another group was kept busy building roads. Most of us were tired and worn out, from not having slept as the damp floors with a little straw

on were too cold. The wind howling through every crack kept us awake, and the nights were quite bitter at this time. Yet, by the end of a week, the strenuous work during the day made us sleep, despite all the freezing discomforts. We were just too exhausted physically and mentally to take note of anything. Food was also monotonous and of insufficient quantity to sustain any activity beyond working. This, coupled with the hopelessness, primitive sanitary conditions, made life as unpleasant as possible. Many times, before falling asleep, I thought, if this had not happened, I would have been in America by now and in the throes of a new life.

But there was no use in bemoaning my fate as I had no answer to give myself. Looking around, watching these men, who were twice my age and more, and realizing how hard it was for them to take, sort of consoled me in my despair. Many of the older men adopted me as their "pet", so to speak, and gave me a larger share of food than I was entitled to, thus aiding me in my continuous battle to appease my hungry stomach. In small ways, I tried to reciprocate by doing some little work details for them, where their failing strength gave out. No matter how hopeless and bleak the day ahead looked, my hope of someday reaching the shores of the United States, sustained me in trying to surmount the unpleasant episode.

Finally, after a few weeks at the camp, we were given permission to write a letter to the American Consul in Algiers. It was our first contact with the outside world. Receiving a reply to our letter, we were regretfully informed of the Consul's being unable to actively intervene in our behalf as we were not American citizens, but, at the same time, if we should be freed by the French authorities, he would extend our entry permits which had meantime expired. So, at last, here was some ray of hope that, eventually we would still be able to come to the U.S. Of course, how long it would take, nobody dared to guess, but the important thing was that the entry "key" had not been damaged. A few days later we received a letter

from the International Refugee Society that they were in possession of our names and present misfortune, and they would undertake to apply pressure, for our release, at the French government in Paris. So, help for us was being undertaken, we were not forgotten or written off. News like that had the effect of adding great quantities of "vitamins" to our meager rations. Even the sickest and weakest among us perked up as if new energies had been infused into them. Correspondence with some refugee organization in Algiers was also started, and their reply assured us that we would be released shortly. With all the good tidings at our disposal, everything seemed easier, the heavy work of roadbuilding, somehow, was not as tiring as before; the monor brutalities of the guards were easier to endure, after allm we had hope again, and nothing is as nourishing to the wounded soul or as potent a medicine, as hope.

One day during the first week of December, after returning to camp from a hard day's work, we were kept in formation while the other internees were dismissed. Wondering why this was being done, possibly punishment was to be meted out for not having done enough work or what else could it be, went through our minds. We did not have to wait long, as the camp commander, flanked by some of his assistants, appeared and informed us that the French govern,ent had decided to set us free. They would allow us to continue our journey to the U.S. and would cooperate fully in making the necessary arrangements. For a few seconds we stood in silence before the impact of this news. Then jubilation took over and we started to whoop it up. Even some of the older men who only a short time before, barely had the strength to stand uprighr, suddenly had the energy to jump around and dance like fellows half their age. Our happiness knew no bounds this evening, there was singing and carefree talk like we were honored guests at some festive occasion. Any large group has some pessimists who would try to throw cold water on any kind of rejoicing, but

ours did not get a chance to inject sour grapes as they were outshouted at every turn; a word of caution just was not appreciated.

Later in the evening, after most of us had calmed down somewhat, all kinds of discussions were taking place as some speculated on the amount of pressure the French government must have been subject to, releasing us, and for what reason the mistake was made in interning us in the first place. Some people were certain the reason was that one of our fellow passengers was supposed to have been a former Russian prince, but in possession of a German passport. After a couple of days he had been removed from the camp under heavy guard, and was never seen again. At this time rumors had him to be a German spy, but if it was a fact was pure conjecture. Some people were convinced that for the French to catch this one spy, all of us innocents had to suffer. Another group held the viewpoint that the French had committed a blunder and did not quite know how to extricate themselves gracefully. Listening to all these different opinions, one could conclude that this affair affecting a few lives, held the focal point on the world scene. Needless to say, most of us did not sleep at all this night.

The following morning, after being counted off, we were told we would not have to go to work but should pack our luggage, as later on buses would come to transport us back to Algiers. Somehow, all this seemed unreal and hard to grasp. Only twenty-four hours ago, we left for work with hardly any thoughts, at all, as one miserable day lay ahead, but now, this ordeal would soon be over. The sudden change in our fortunes left us mentally apathetic.

Right after breakfast, the camp commander came into our barracks, inquiring as to whether he could send some of his soldiers to help us pack or whether he could do anything else for us. He had given orders for us to receive a wine ration which would arrive shortly. What a turn-about this was; first

we were treated like dirt and now--like honored guests. The rough treatment meted out previously, was, in my opinion, due to the Colonial authorities having believed they had us in their charge for the duration of the war and were surprised at having received the order for our release directly from Paris. Having been, at times, exceedingly brutal, in their dealings with us, they were now embarrassed, and tried to make amends. They feared that information about their treatment of prisoners might leak out and cause them trouble.

We were still in their power and deemed it advisable to be agreeable to any suggestions made. In a way, it was fun to order some of our former guards around; but this enjoyment was short-lived, as a couple of buses arrived and we were told to prepare for our trip back to Algiers. After much ceremony, and the French are great in this respect, the camp commander shook hands with each of us, wishing us luck, while his soldiers took care of our luggage. To our great surprise, no guards were provided, only a sargeant and two soldiers, without any weapons, comprised the entire escort. The gate of the compound opened up and we were at last on our way. The majority were quiet and subdued for the first few minutes, as all this seemed so unbelievable. A short time later, Fort Boghar was only a tiny speck, far in the distance and our mood changed and laughter and jubilation took hold. Being relaxed, we enjoyed the beautiful scenery and some of the picturesque villages and towns we passed.

Early in the afternoon, we arrived at the same custom building where we had been many weeks before, at the beginning of this gruesome misadventure. Several men of the International Refugee Organization (HIAS), were waiting for us. They took us to a nearby restaurant with the French authorities picking up the tab, and all this without guards. After a good meal, we felt as if we had returned to civilization once again and, from there we were taken to the U.S. Consul where expired entry permits were extended as were those not yet invalid. A spokesman was selected to express our thanks for all

the help rendered in our behalf.

Arriving back at the customs office, we were told our baggage was already on board a ship scheduled to leave for Marseilles and we should follow immediately. Up to now, the past hours had been quite a chase, but, under the circumstances, we were only to happy to leave French North Africa as soon as possible.

An armed merchant vessel, operated by the French Navy, and by the name of "Ville de Algiers", was awaiting our embarkation, and we were to be the only passengers. Very shortly, we started to pull anchor and began moving. In no time at all, we left the harbor of Algiers, and sailed into the waters of the Mediterranean, and the shore line became barely discernible. Everybody was engrossed in his own thoughts; if we had not spent almost two months in Africa, we would have been in the U.S. by now, and who knows what one might have been doing. All those different private reflections were rudely interrupted as the ship started rolling and swaying, as she entered a storm area of some intensity. With the increasing fury most of the smiling faces, including my own, were soon changed to ashen gray, with all sorts of facial contortions, in attempting to control stomach butterflies. Some jealousy crept up as all of us so stricken, had to watch the antics of the few unaffected souls, and being unable to respond in any way, to their coaxing invitation not to let our heads down, but to walk around, seemed a particularly cruel sport.

Towards morning, the storm subsided, and the sun shone brightly, presenting a picture as if all the events of the previous night had never occurred. In our weakened condition, the fact that we would soon leave this Mediterranean storm area, gave us some degree of comfort. To their credit, the ship's personnel, were very helpful and the cordial relations established between us, unlike the attitude of our captors in Africa, gave a much more favorable view of the French, and

aided considerably to buoy up our spirits.

Very early the next day, the Ville de Algiers, docked in Marseilles, yet a while passed without our having received permission to land. To our inquiries as to why we were being kept aboard ship, we were informed that a French commission would arrive to investigate us, before we, as enemy nationals, would be permitted to step foot on French soil. Clearly this did not make any sense, but in dealing with the bureaucratic arm of a government, French or not, was evidently no different, in that one hand does not know what the other is doing, and the accumulation of an ever increasing volume of red tape, appeared to be the only solution to satisfy the bureaucratic soul. For this reason, the sudden thought of an investigative committee didn't seem to be discernible, but we had to concede the fact that France was at war with Germany for over four months now, and technically, we had German passports. What was the use of trying to fathom a mess of red tape which the French had brought upon themselves? The majority resolved to be patient, while another group of our usual pessimists held the viewpoint that we would be interned here and our being told that we could continue our journey to America, was only a pretext to keep us calm. During this heated debate, some naval officers and civilians boarded the boat. Was this the investigative commission, went through our minds?

We did not have to wait long before we got an affirmative answer, as we were told to appear before them as our names were called. In due time my name came up; the questions were few and of the same variety as two months before on board the Conte di Savoia, before our imprisonment began. Whether I was opposed to Nazism and in favor of the Allied cause, was the gist of the questioning, in other words, evidently, just a formality. Answering the interrogations emphatically, that I was against Nazi tyranny and praying for an Allied victory, I impressed the officials by replying in French, after all, I had plenty of opportunity to brushup on my school foreign language, in the meantime. Upon the completion of all inter-

views, we were assembled and the highest ranking officer spoke to us; that the government is convinced we were sincere enemies of the Nazis and friends of the Allies and so they had decided to set us free on French soil and declared us friends of the French Republic, even though, we were technically, enemy nationals, in possession of any enemy passport. Regrets were expressed for the inconvenience caused by our being interned on our way to a friendly country, and his government would turn our group over to officials of the HIAS, for them to facilitate the resumption of our trip to the U.S. Cheers broke out from all of us and made it impossible for the speaker to continue; all he was able to say in conclusion, was that representatives of the Refugee organization were waiting for us to land, but he smiled, for he was an understanding man.

We, now, suddenly declared "friends of the French Republic", rushed down the gangplank like demons were after us, right into the waiting arms of the reception committee. Once again, we were taken to a restaurant and promised that we would be informed about future plans. With broad grins, they repeated every so often, we have nothing to worry as everything is taken care of and we would soon be in America.

With news like that, after what we had been through, all the emotional blocks were pulled and we gorged ourselves unmercifully. One of the men, under whose care we were, addressed our group with the good tidings that the Italian Shipping Line accepted our interrupted tickets as still valid and would transport us from Genoa to New York on one of their ships at the same accommodations we had previously. In addition, the Italian government granted us forty-eight hours (transit visa). Our expenses here at Marseilles, as well as transportation to Genoa and accommodations there, would be defrayed by the HIAS. The French had already issued exit permits. What better news could one hear? Some fellows really started enjoying the wine, and suddenly found it difficult to get up from the table, while some more sentimental souls cried unashamedly. We were further

told to stay in one group as the French as well as Italian governments had made all arrangements for us, as such. The Refugee Society had rented rooms at several smaller hotels in Marseilles and would give us certificates for meals as well as giving us a modest amount of pocket money. After all the tumult had died down, with which every piece of good news was greeted, I approached one of the HIAS men asking him whether some information could be sent to my parents in Germany that I am alive as they had not heard from me for over two months and did not know what had happened. Taking all this information down he told me they would contact the International Red Cross in my behalf and would send an appropriate message through their facilities. Before we left the restaurant, we were cautioned to remain strictly to ourselves, as our Germanic accents might bring about our arrest by an overzealous policeman or military patrol. The briefing completed, we were taken to a hotel. Sleeping in a bed with fresh linen made us realize how wonderful civilization was.

The following days were pleasant, as we spent them sightseeing, in small groups, Marseilles, being an old harbor town, as well as the chief port between France and her overseas empire, had a hard to define charm, even though it was by no means a modern city. The city was teeming with different uniforms, representing all the varied races of the French empirre, and all sorts of colorful characters paraded through the streets. Just to walk along free and unhindered, was marvelous, after all what can be sweeter than to be a free man again? Little did I suspect that six years later I would march through this same metropolis once again under entirely different circumstances; then as an American soldier. By then the Nazi tyranny would be crushed and the bells of freedom would resound over most of Western Europe, with the exception of where Nazi domination had been replaced by Communist terror. But this was in the future, and as I walked through the streets of Marseilles in December 1939, France was still a world power and

given the edge over Germany.

Two days later, we were put on a train bound for Genoa, Italy. The trip was quite scenic as it passed the whole length of the Riviera, arriving at our destination the following afternoon. A representative of the local chapter of the Refugee Society, took us to one of the better hotels in town. He asked for everyone's attention as the next announcement would be a real surprise. Everybody stopped talking and wondered what he could have to say of major importance. With a smiling face, he informed us the next scheduled ocean liner was, of all things, the Conte di Savoia, and we would be her passengers again. Now laughter broke out, what a coincidence this was; to go back to our old "mother" ship. Still, no one felt this to be a bad omen. All conversation was halted as a couple of Italian Line officials arrived to straighten out the paper work necessary, as preparatory, to sailing. Some of our group had dealt with one or the other of them previously, and so recognized each other. Shortly, we were chatting like long, lost friends. The paper work completed, the men left, but not without informing us that the day after tommorow, at nine o'clock in the morning, we would be picked up by a bus and we were to be ready without fail.

During the better part of the following day, I spent some time looking around at familiar places, remembering the time I was penniless, and the memories of hunger plus open-air beds came rushing back. At one time in historyall roads led to Rome, but in my case, they all seemed to converge on Genoa. Two months before I had arrived here expecting this to be the last European stop before the U.S., but it was not meant to be. Once again, it was to be the jumping off point of a new journey, only this time I hoped it would be a straight line instead of a circle.

Punctually, as promised, the bus pulled up in front of our hotel. We could hardly contain ourselves in our anticipation of seeing the Conte di Savoia again. As a courtesy,

we had been assigned, wherever possible, the same cabins. Meeting the same stewards, as well as other personnel, was like finding old friends. The men whose loved ones had continued their trip, wanted to know all the details of how everyone fared without them. In a way, having drawn the same ship again, was comforting, as all tried to make us feel especially welcome.

Busy talking about our African experiences, we noticed that we were leaving Genoa behind. Rushing on deck, we waved good-bye to a city we did not want to see agin under similiar conditions. The vessel gathered steam and we were on our way. Maybe this time, we would make America, at least one could hope. Our journey through the waters of the Mediterranean was uneventful, even though most of us were apprehensive; sneaking furtive glances towards the horizon, wondering whether some French warship might appear out of nowhere; but nothing happened. One of the ship's officers must have noticed our nervousness and in order to allay our fears in suddenly seeing land, told us our next stop would be Gibralter, where the Allies required all neutral ships to stop. Of course, our few alarmists were worried that the English might also intern us for a while, just for good measure.

The stop at Gibralter was very short. An English officer came aboard, probably to check the passenger list, and soon left. Everything must have been satisfactory, as the engines turned over and we left the "Rock" behind. Now some of our worst pessimists, allowed their conversion to optimism, as less than a week stood between us and the American shoreline. We were now in the Atlantic, and this being the middle of December, there was no way to escape the fury of the storms. With all the good food beckoning, I spent the next few days in bed, let's just say the spirit was willing to fight, but the flesh was awfully weak. All this did not matter really, for, soon the trip would be over, and by good fortune and the intervention of a higher power, I was one of the lucky ones.

Early on the morning of December 23, 1939, the sea was calm again, and the voice over the loudspeaker announced that we were just outside New York harbor. Weak as I was from not having been able to eat, the long desired destination was approaching, and not a thousand horses, could have held me down in my bed, as I wanted to take in every moment of seeing America emerging over the horizon. Dressing myself, I went on deck where the wind blew strong and the view was limited, due to a light fog. Holding onto the railing and with the help of the cold breeze which brushed all around me, my head started clearing and I felt like my old self again.

The long history of the United States is studded with all kinds of adventures of how some of her future children reached her shores. So, in proper retrospect, my story of how I made it and the gauntlet of obstacles I had to run, may pale in comparison, to the experiences of many others before, and some who may yet follow. But for an eighteen year old boy, who received the "housekey', so to speak, on the same day World War II broke out, right in the center of Hell's cauldron, the odds certainly were not favorable for ever reaching here, but even odds are powerless to compete with luck.

Standing there, holding on to the railing on board the Conte di Savoia, and watching the flow of the ever increasing harbor traffic, I was thinking, if it only would not be so foggy I probably would be able to see the skyscrapers of New York by now. Something came in sight, maybe this is a sky-scraper, I thought, but no, it looked more like a statue. Now I recognized the figure in the water, it was the Statue of Liberty. Looking intently towards her full outline as much as the fog permitted, it seemed to me, that the Lady on the stone pedestal was bidding me welcome. Acknowledging this silent greeting, just between us, I felt then, and I always shall, that she is the sweetest lady of them all.